



# Gaming Your Classroom:

Fun & movement in any lesson

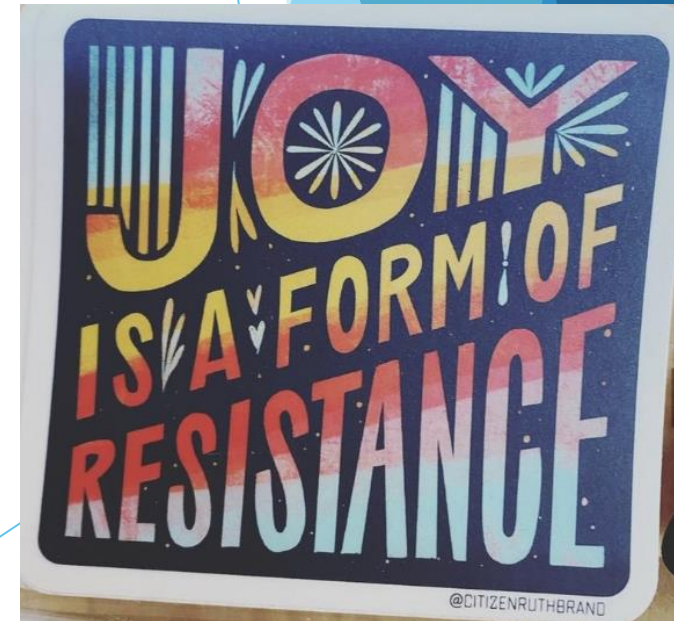
May 2, 2025

Lisa K. Forbes, PhD, LPC, RPT  
University of Colorado Denver  
Professors at Play

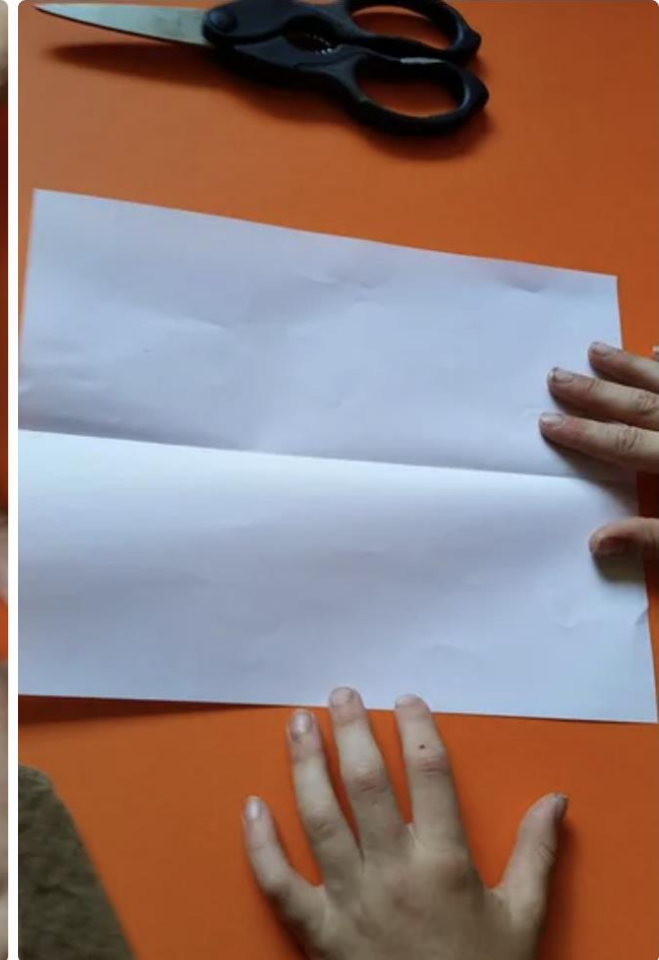


# Key Terms

- ▶ Play
- ▶ Games
- ▶ Playfulness
- ▶ Playful Pedagogy
- ▶ Play as an activity
- ▶ Play as a mindset
- ▶ Play as a philosophy



# Mini Books: One Piece of Paper



Fold the paper long ways and open it like a hot dog bun.

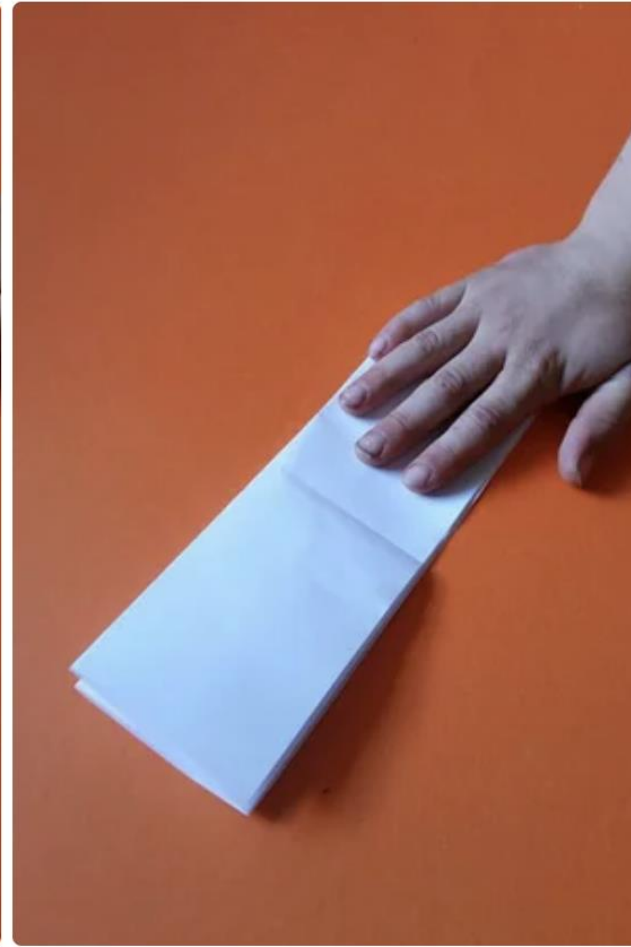
Directions for Book: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdrWvJsjhd4>

OR Written Directions: <https://www.instructables.com/An-8-Page-Book-From-a-Piece-of-Paper/>



Fold the paper in half the other way.

## Step 4: W Fold



Fold one side back and flip it over and fold the other side back so when it is opened it looks like a W.

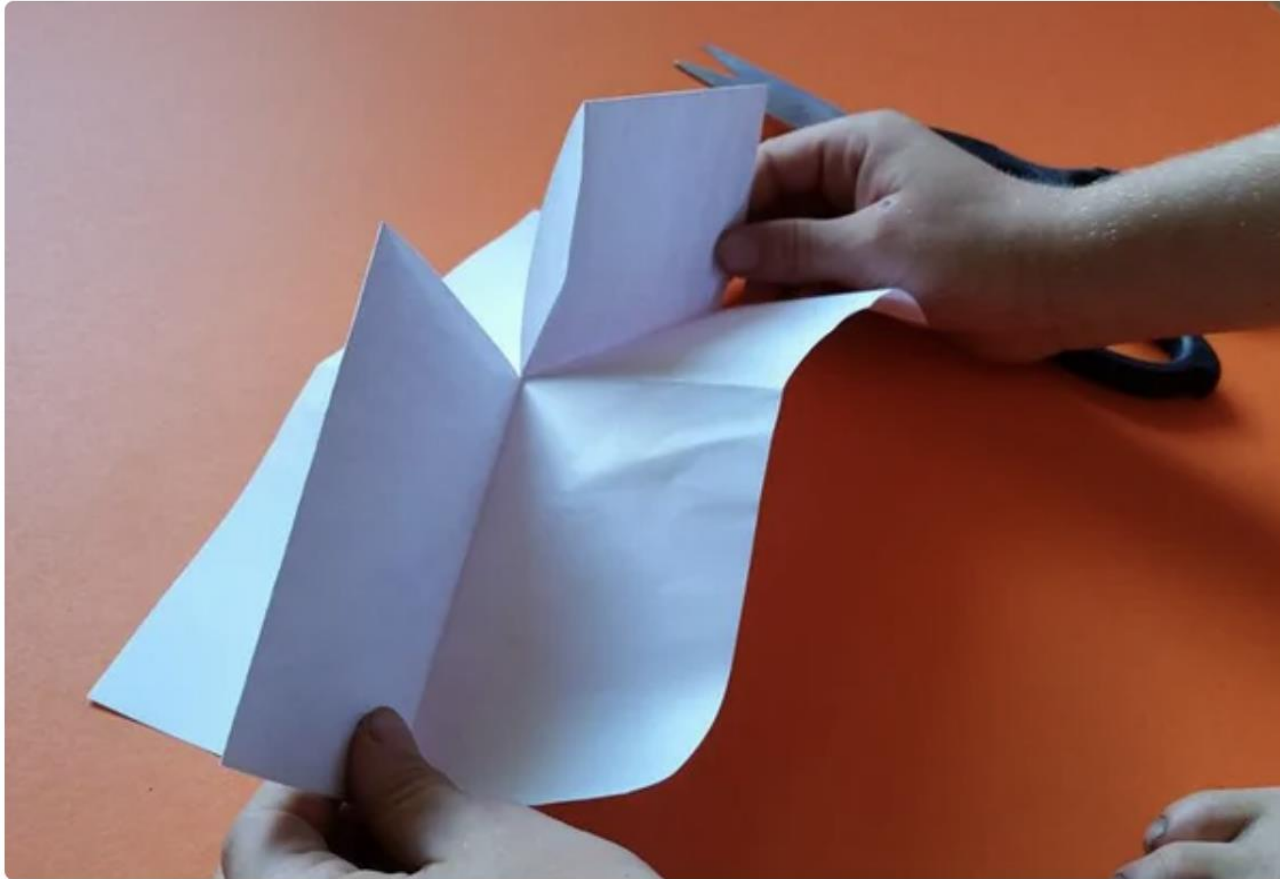
## Step 5: Cut on the Middle Crease



Cut the paper on the middle crease that you made with the first fold.

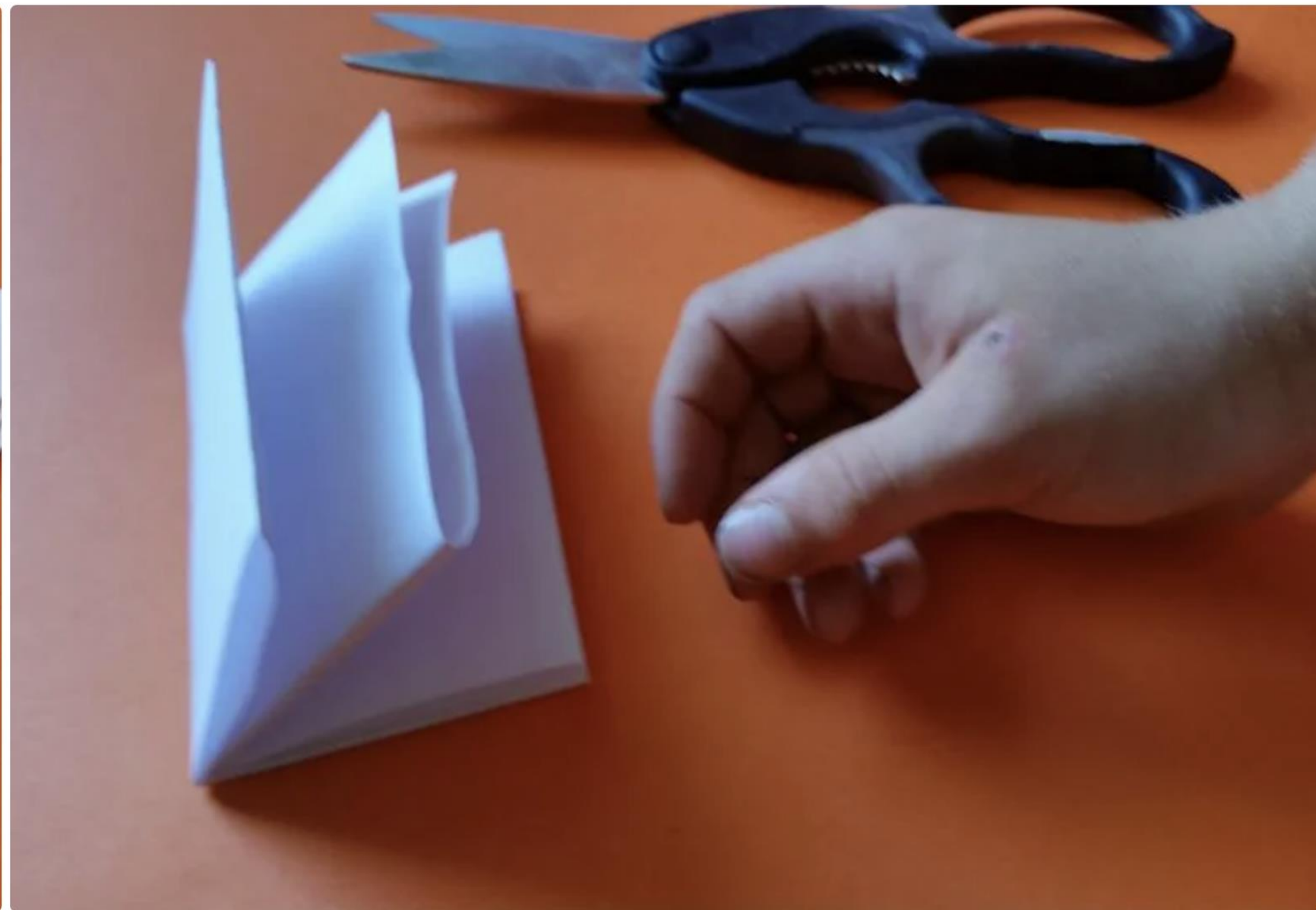
If you don't have scissors, you can rip.

## Step 6: Fold the Paper in Half



Fold the paper in half so it looks like an X on the end.

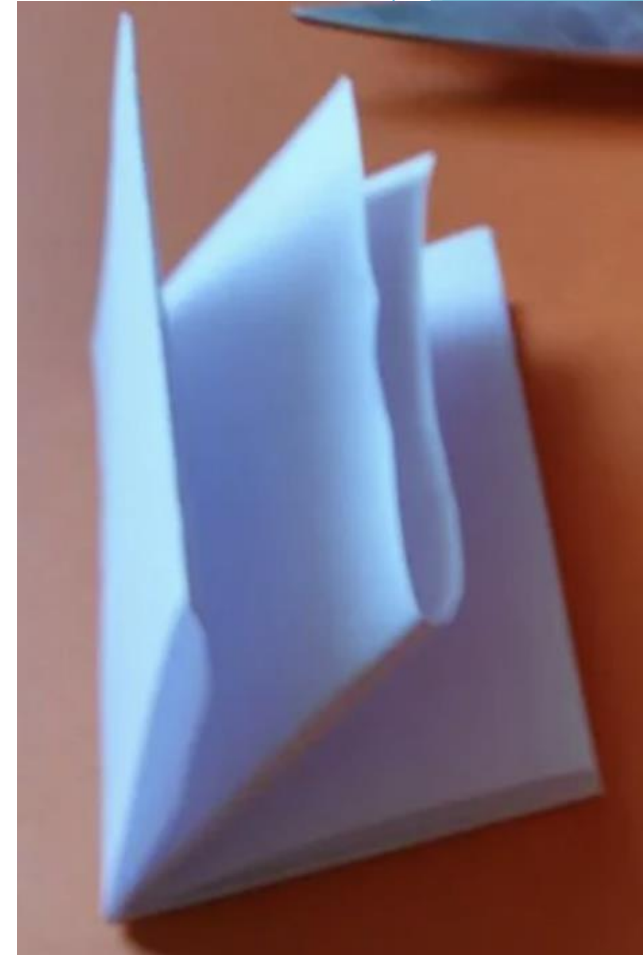
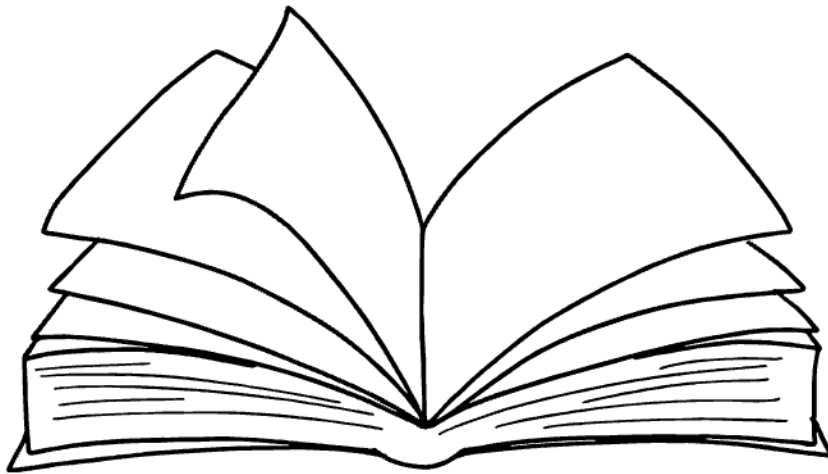
## Step 7: Press Down the Book



Press down the pages to form your book. Write or draw what ever you like.

# Mini Books

- ▶ You should have 8 pages!
- ▶ We will use the book in a bit...



# How I Came Into This Work



# Spirits of Practice

(Heath et al., 2022)



- ▶ Practice is animated by underlying spirits, not just mechanical actions.
- ▶ A guide to efficacy. A path to recovering humanity.
- ▶ Values, energies, & emotional postures.
- ▶ "Ways of being" or beliefs that guide how we show up.
  - ▶ Wonder, mischief, invitation, disruption, relationality.



# Exploring Our Spirits of Practice

- ★ What was it that brought you to this field?
- ★ What are your beliefs about transformational learning?
- ★ What are the core spirits that drive your teaching practice?  
*(Deeper, more personal than a pedagogical theory. Fresh language)*  
Example: Instead of “Respect,” I might say “Rebel love.”
- ★ If we were to watch this spirit in action, how might you imagine it shows up in the classroom? How would we know it was present?

# Designing Your Spirits of Practice

First Literacy Professional Development Workshop



## The Trickster of Mischief

THE SACRED REFUSAL TO LET RIGID SYSTEMS  
DEFINE WHAT'S POSSIBLE. A WILLINGNESS TO  
POKE, PROVOKE, AND PLAYFULLY SUBVERT THE  
RULES — ALWAYS WITH LOVE.



Where can you be delightfully disruptive in your  
practice? How can you model mischief as a form of  
intellectual and emotional courage?

# Practice vs. Spirit

- ▶ Are our core beliefs alive in our classrooms – or just in our heads?



## Claimed Values

- **Critical Thinking**
- **Creativity & Innovation**
- **Preparing Democratic Citizens**
- **Fostering Lifelong Learners**
- **Promoting Equity & Access**



## Contradictory Reality

- Memorize content and regurgitate it on standardized tests.
- Rigid syllabi, standardized rubrics, and fear of grade penalties discourage risk-taking and original thought.
- Classrooms are often hierarchical, with limited opportunities for shared power, dialogue, or co-constructed knowledge.
- Learning is framed as a task to “complete” for a grade, grades and deadlines create pressure that reduces intrinsic motivation.
- The dominant approaches often reflect white, Western, neurotypical norms, creating invisible barriers for marginalized students. Real equity requires changing the system—not just offering accommodations.





**“The biggest, most enduring lesson of school is that learning is work, to be avoided when possible” (Gray, 2015, p. 15).**

# The Devil is in the Details

- ★ For FIVE decades, scholars have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of a purely lecture-based education & advocated for active learning.
- ★ Only 18% of classes were classified as “a student-centered & active style” (e.g., heavy on group work/discussions) (Stains et al., 2019).
- ★ Traditional stand/deliver lectures: students 1.5x more likely to fail (Freeman et al., 2014).

# Brain-Based Learning

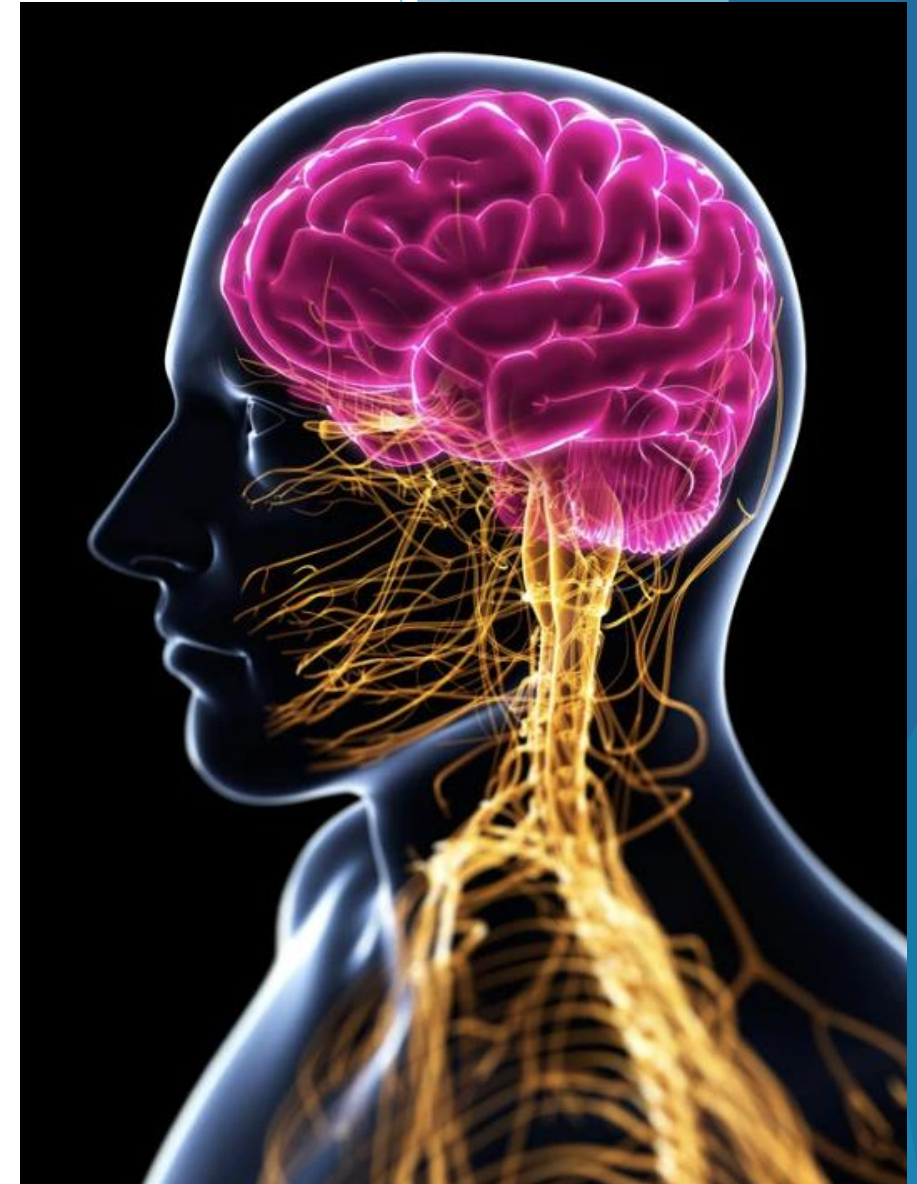


Neuroplasticity



Neurotransmitters conducive to learning:

- Dopamine
- Norepinephrine
- Acetylcholine
- Oxytocin



## ★ Conditions

- ❖ Novelty
- ❖ Social connection
- ❖ Fun/Play
- ❖ Engagement
- ❖ Humor
- ❖ Safety
- ❖ Alertness

## ★ Emotions

- ❖ Joy
- ❖ Excited
- ❖ Motivated
- ❖ Curious
- ❖ Calm/Relaxed
- ❖ Surprised
- ❖ Creative





# The Disconnect: Cultural + Institutional Norms

~Forces that Shape How Teaching Happens~

- **Cultural Norms:**
  - Professionalism, hierarchy, control, individualism, and perfectionism
- **Higher Ed Norms:**
  - Lectures, grading, standardization, and passive learning.



# Play: Alignment Tool & Counter Practice

(not just fun, engaging, etc.)

- ▶ Fun, engaging, can be non-serious
- ▶ Aligns with our Spirits of Practice
  - ▶ Allows us to teach in ways that invite what we want.
- ▶ Fuel for learning.

Playful  
Pedagogy

Creativity

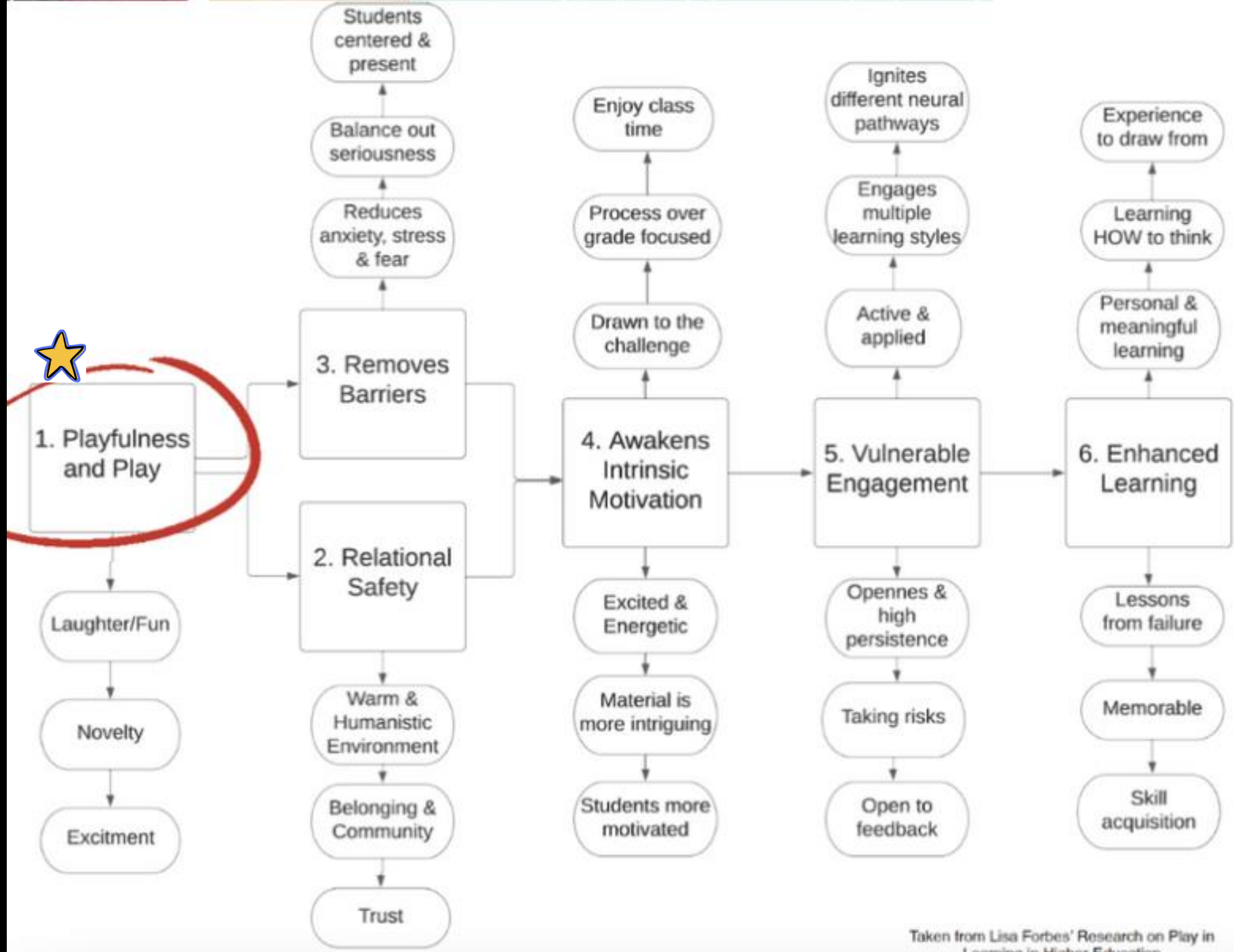
Playfulness

HUMOR

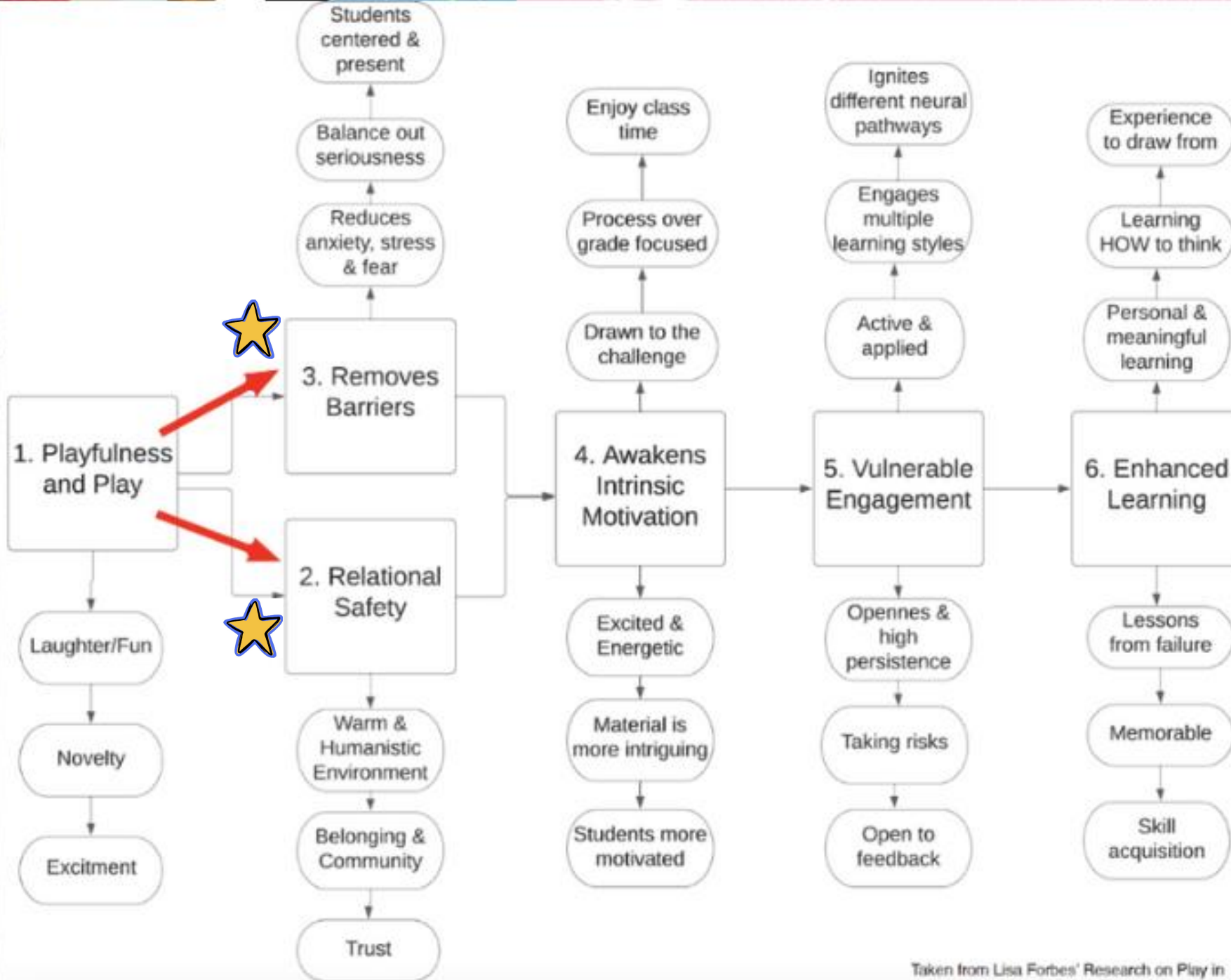
FLEXIBILITY

GAMES

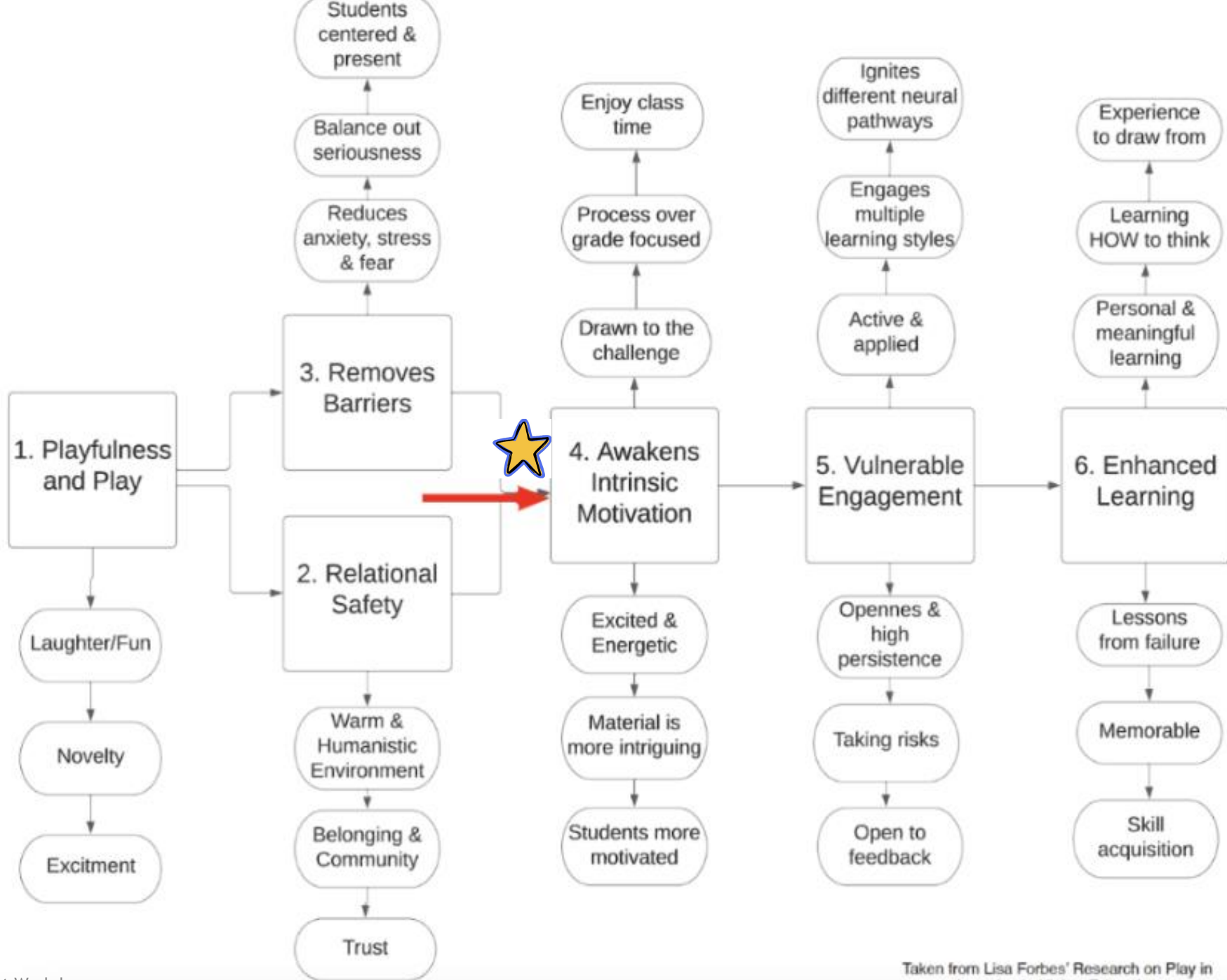
COMMUNITY



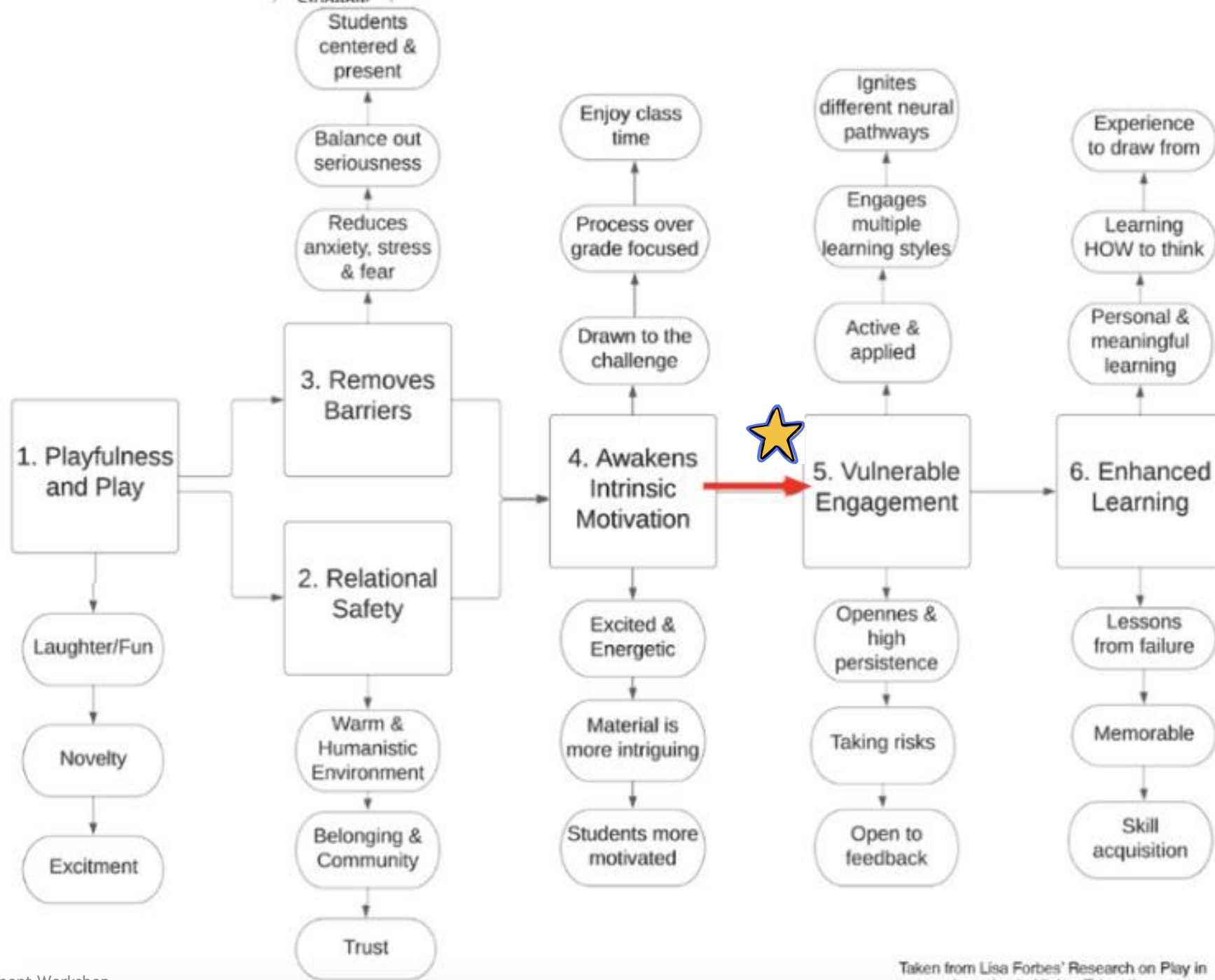
Taken from Lisa Forbes' Research on Play in Learning in Higher Education

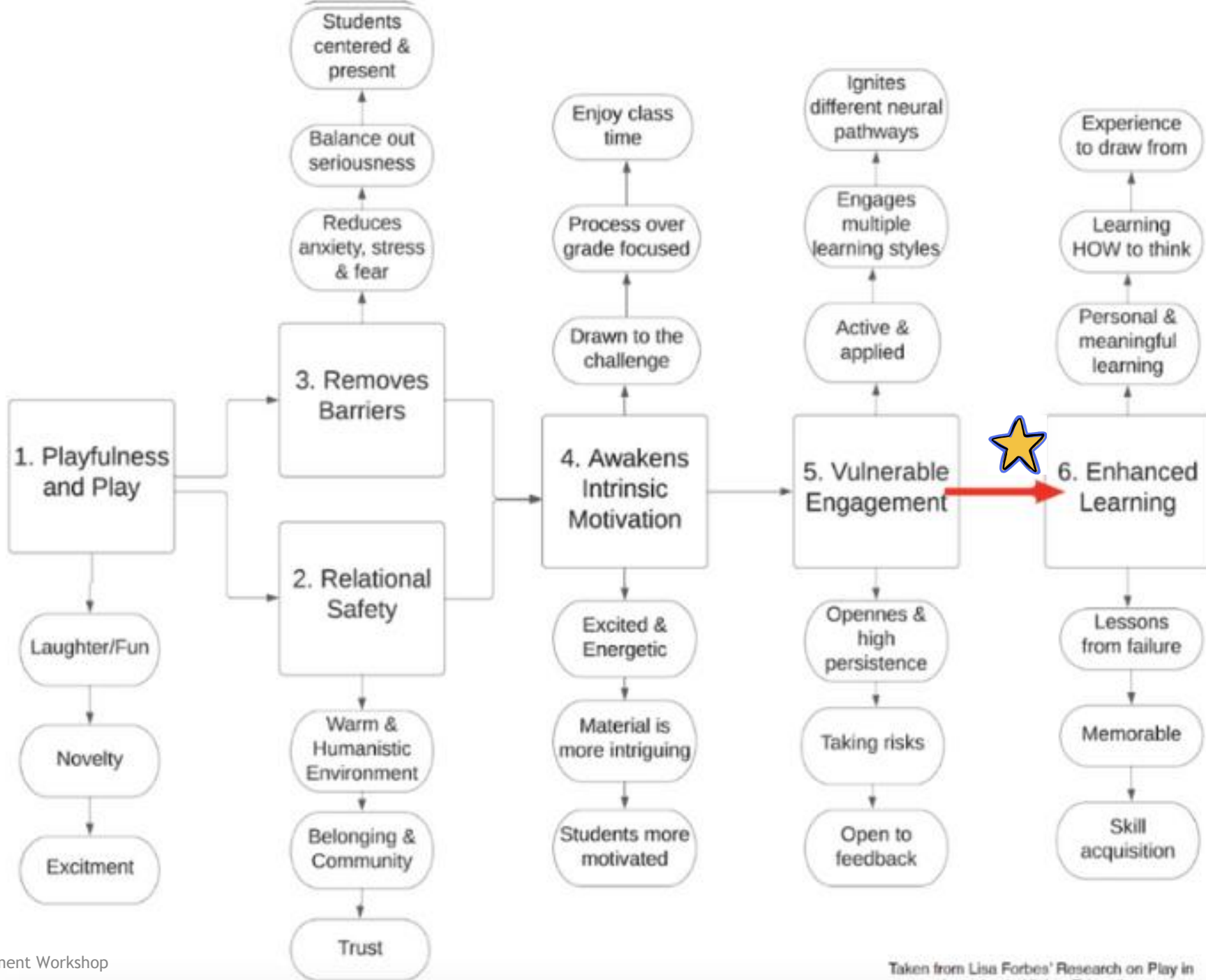


Taken from Lisa Forbes' Research on Play in Learning in Higher Education



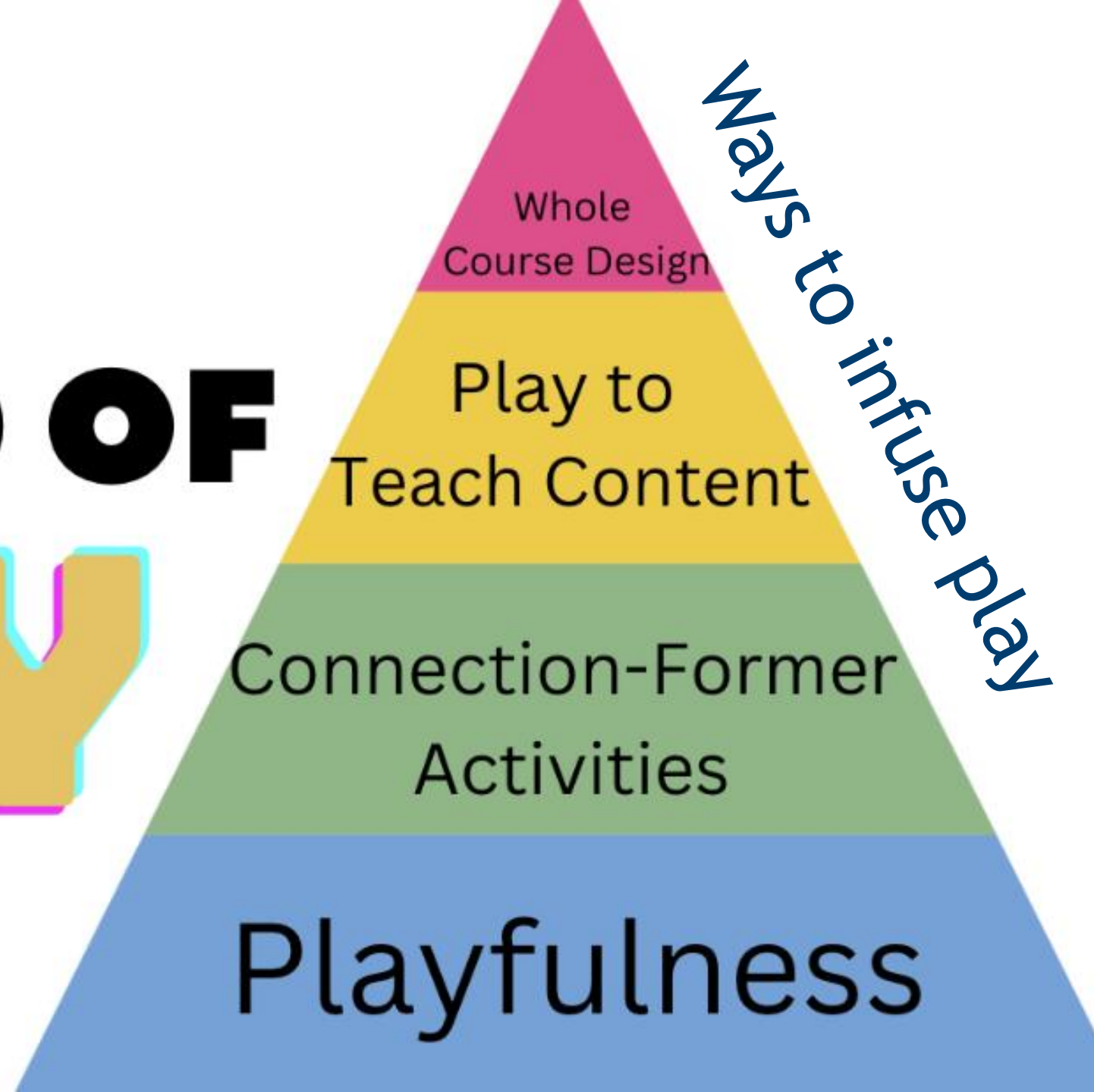
Taken from Lisa Forbes' Research on Play in Learning in Higher Education





# **PYRAMID OF**

# **PLAY**



Ways to infuse play

# PLAYFUL OFFICE HOURS

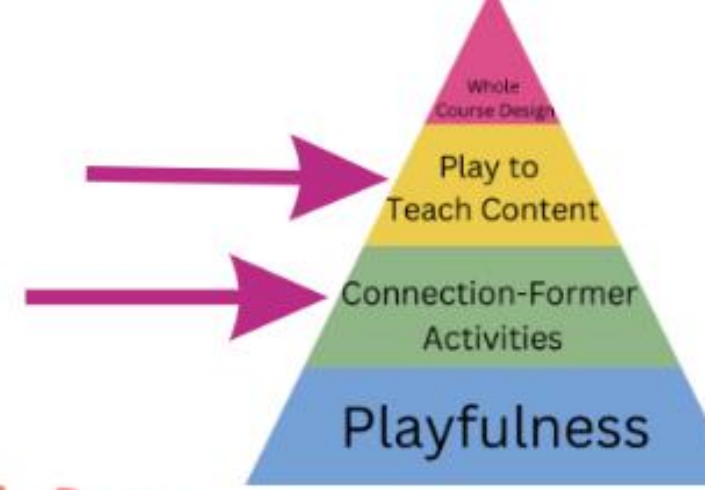


# PLAY TO ENHANCE DISCUSSION

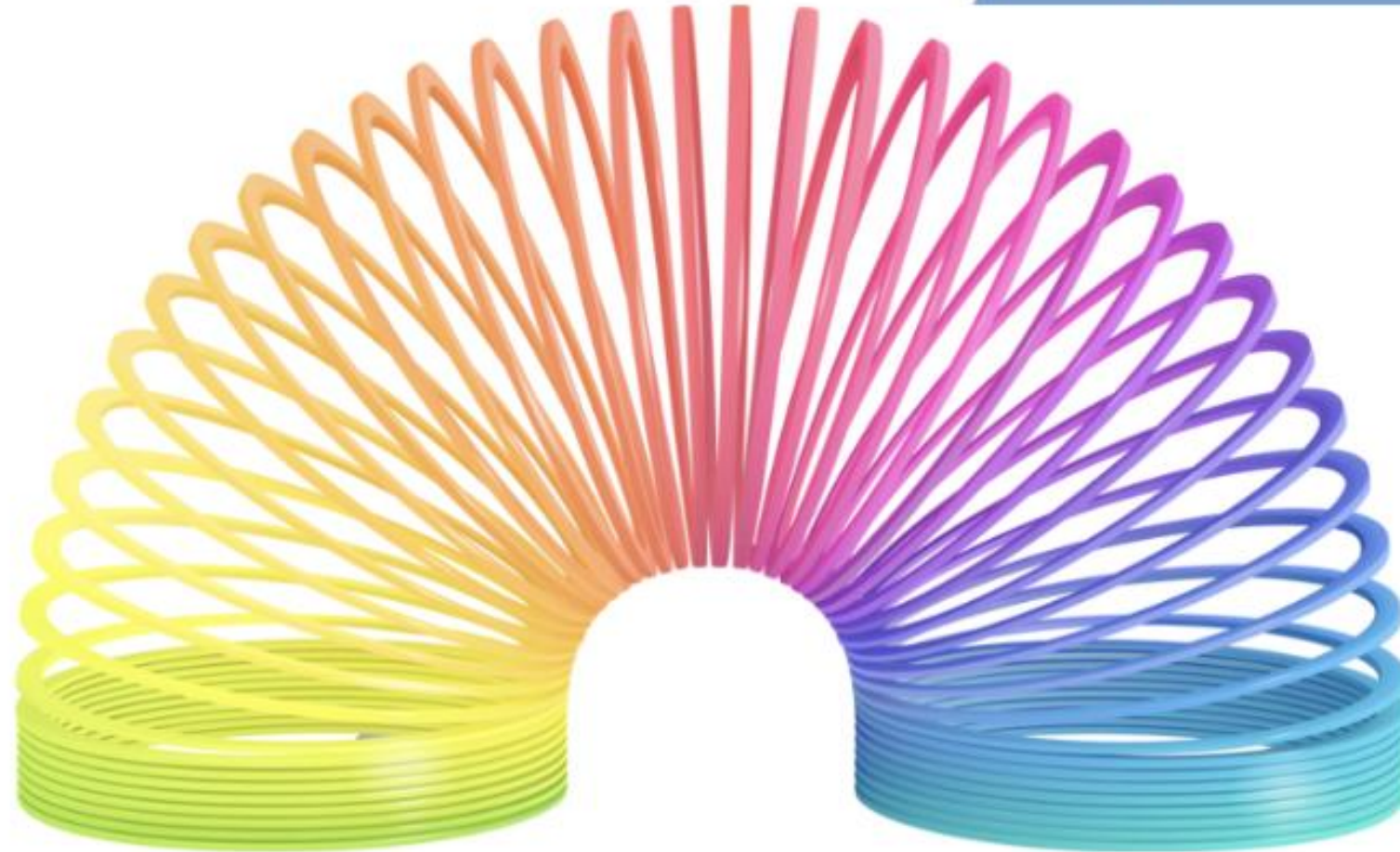
1. Typical discussion.
2. Make it a mission.
3. Record fun video as intro.
4. Don't take self too seriously.



# ITEMS & METAPHORS



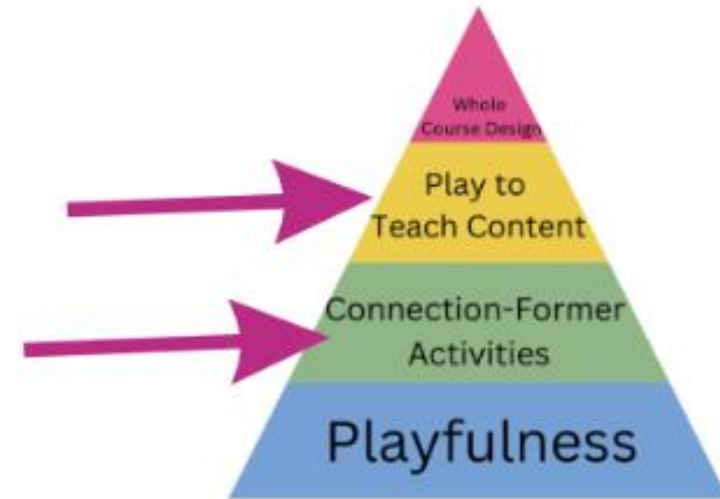
- Find an item in your bag that best describes you.
- As a group, describe how each item relates to \_\_\_\_\_ (topic of the class).
  - Ex: Empathy.



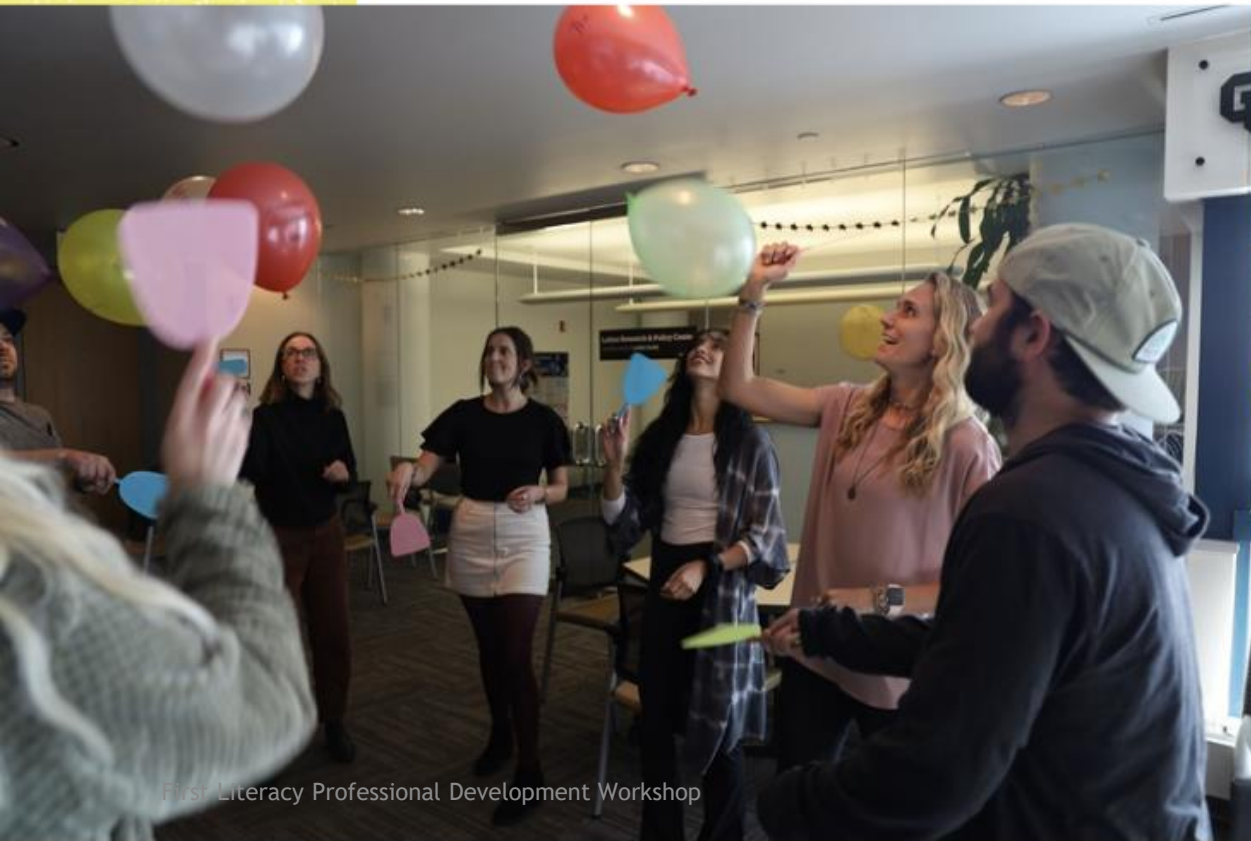
# Paper Airplanes



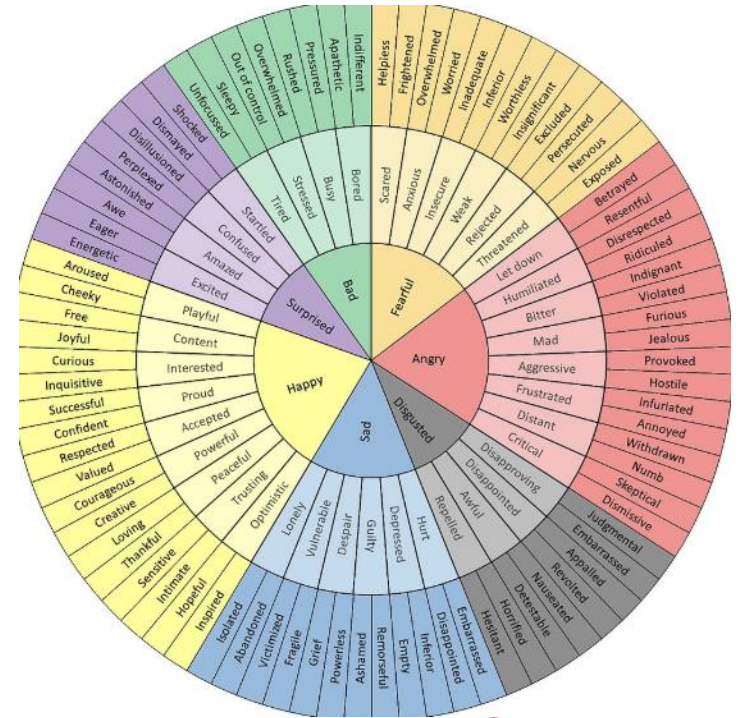
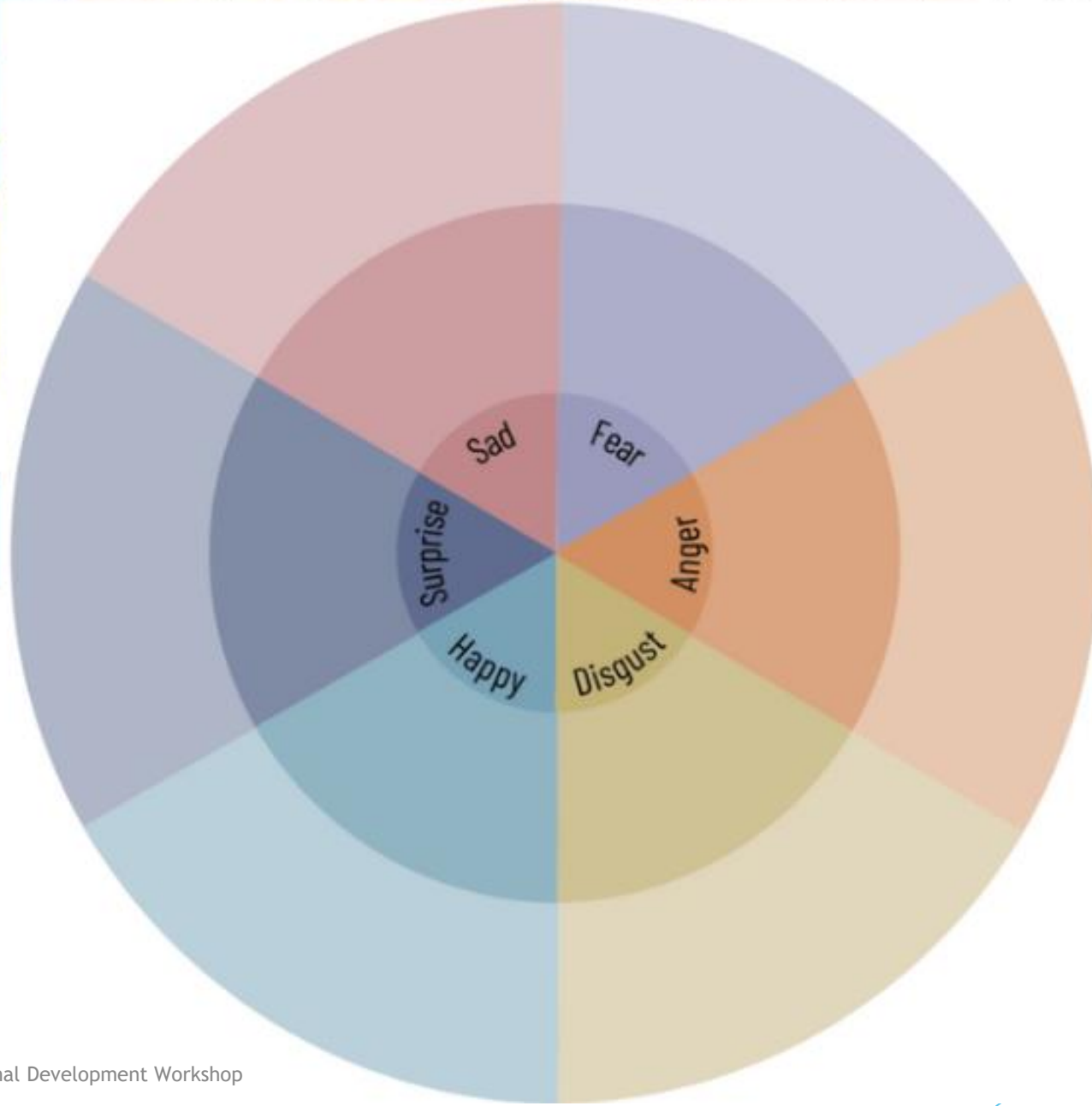
- Paper airplane competition
- Paper airplane reflections



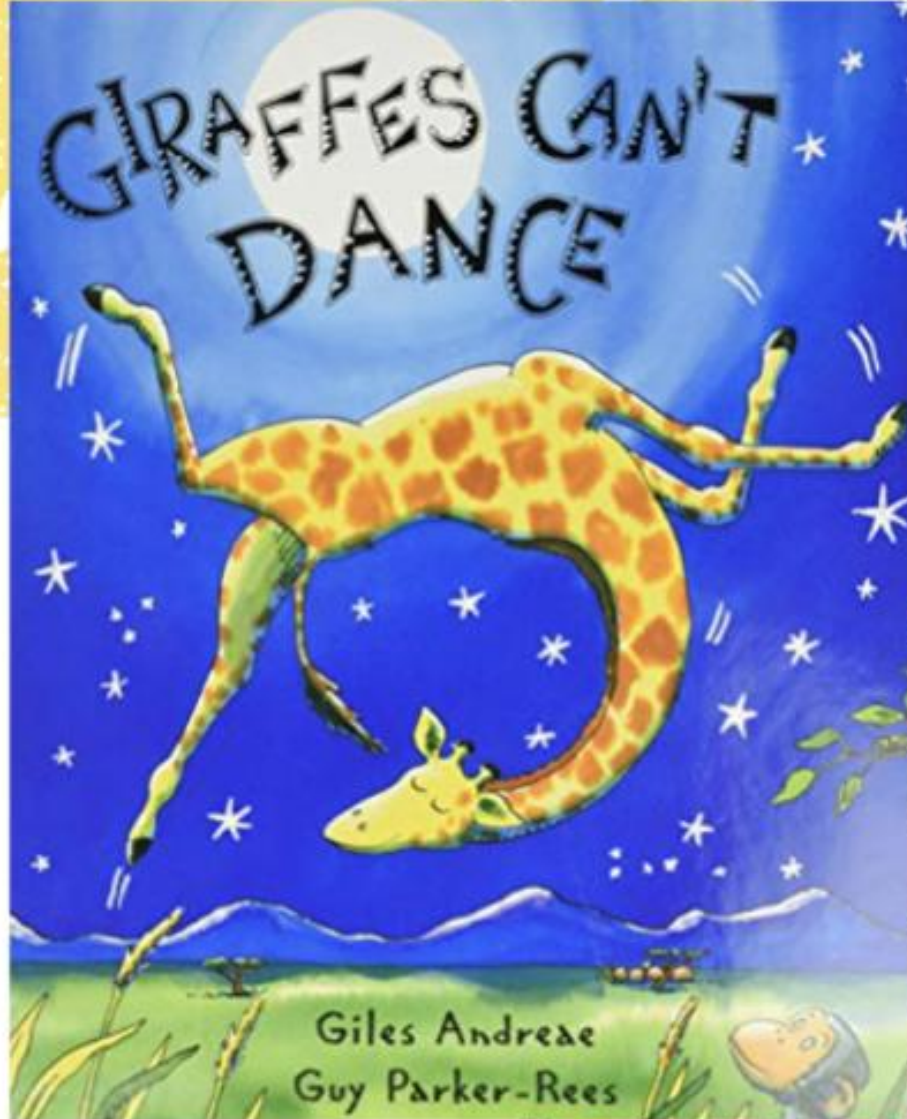
# Balloons & Beach Balls



# FEELING WHEEL GAME



# CHILDREN'S BOOK CASE STUDY

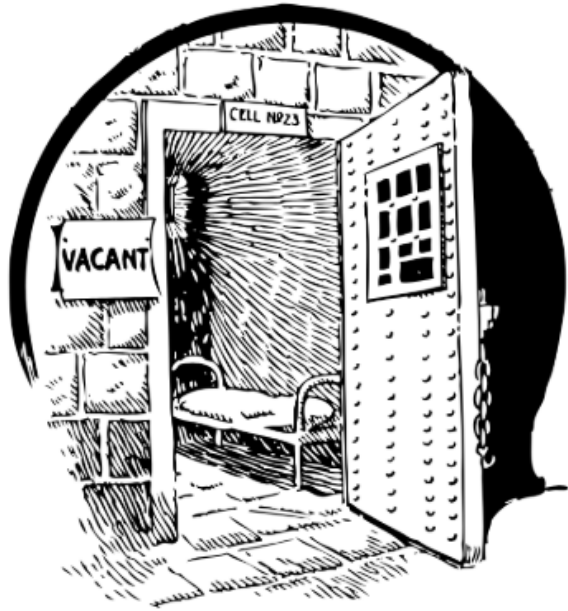


Create a more playful case study to conceptualize, apply theory, tx plan.

- Novel
- Get outside of reality to free students from "right" answers.



# PLAY WITH IDEAS & STATUS QUO



## ESCAPE ROOM

Alt. assignment instead of paper on professional org.



## PODCAST

Alt. assignment option to a written paper.



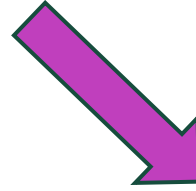
## PROPOSE TO ME

Alt. assignment for novelty, exploring interest.

# Ideas for Adding Games & Play to Any Class

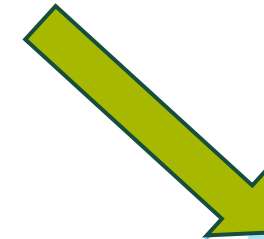


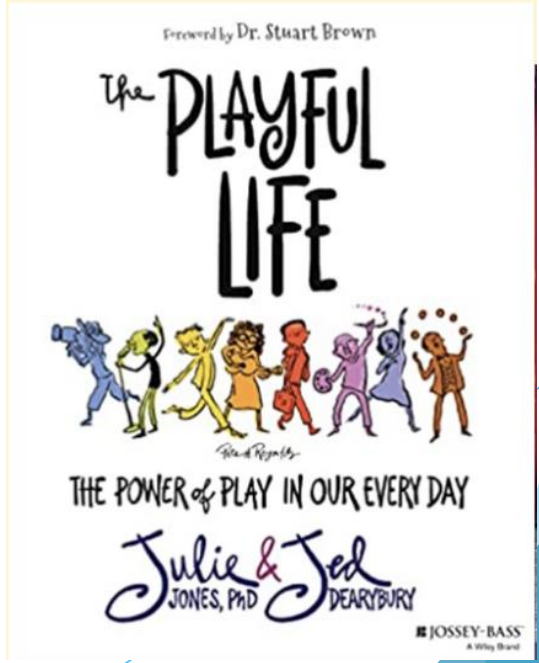
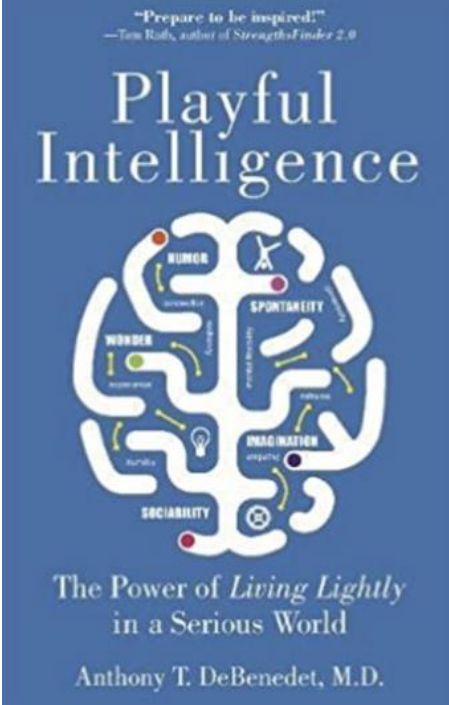
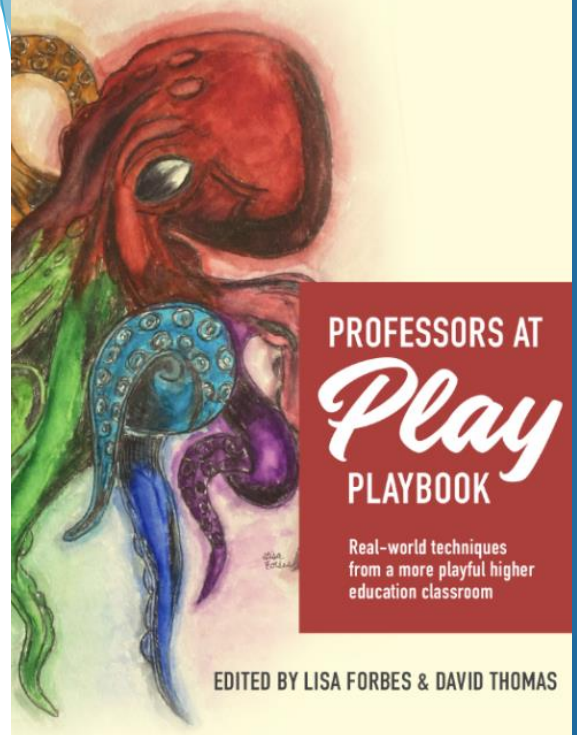
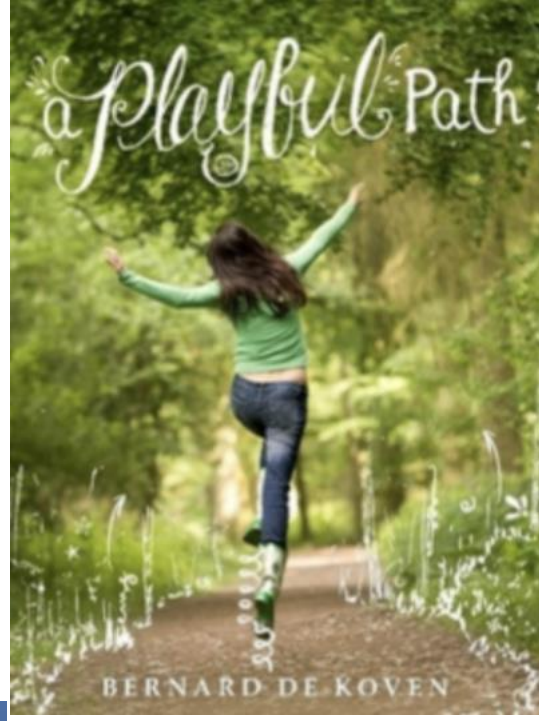
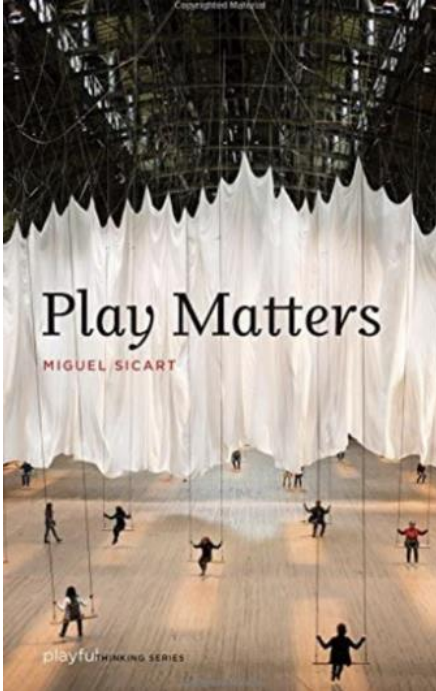
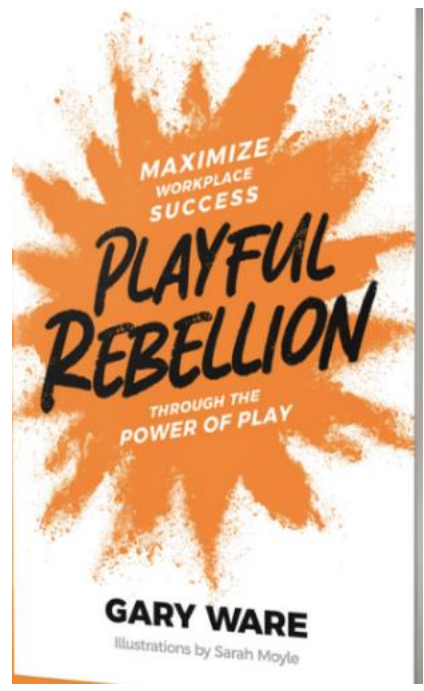
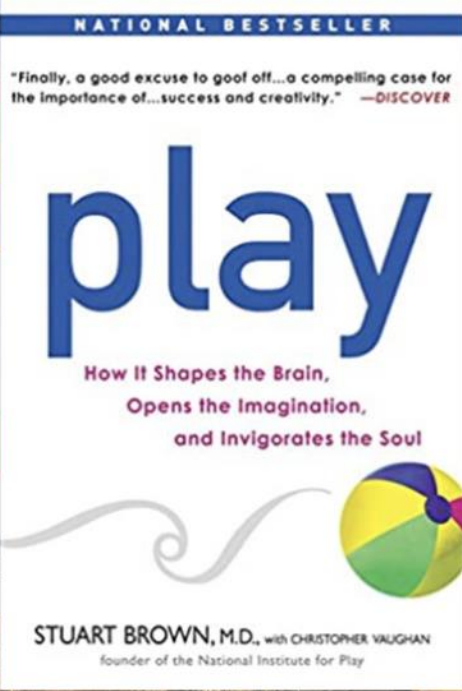
# PROFESSORS AT PLAY



[www.professorsatplay.org](http://www.professorsatplay.org)

## Playful Pedagogy RESOURCES







# Thank you!

We want your feedback. Please be sure to complete the evaluation.

Learn more about upcoming First Literacy Professional Development Workshops at [www.firstliteracy.org/professional-development-workshops/](http://www.firstliteracy.org/professional-development-workshops/)

Follow First Literacy on [Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [X](#) | [Instagram](#)

# References

- ▶ Bligh, 1972; Freeman et al., 2014; Kimmel, 1992; Kroenke, 1984; McLaughlin & Mandlin, 2001; Volpe, 1984.
- ▶ Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. The Penguin Group.
- ▶ Dearybury, J. & Jones, J. (2020). *The playful classroom: The power of play for all ages*. Wiley
- ▶ Forbes, L.K. (2021). The process of playful learning in higher education: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 15(1), 57-73.
- ▶ Freeman et al. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Psychological and Cognitive Sciences*, 111 (23) 8410-8415
- ▶ Gray, P. (2015). *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*. Basic books
- ▶ Heath, T., Carlson, T., & Epston, D. (2022). *Reimagining narrative therapy through practice stories and autoethnography*. Routledge.
- ▶ James, A., & Nerantzi, C. (2019). *The power of play in higher education: Creativity in tertiary learning*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- ▶ Stains et al., 2019). Anatomy of STEM teaching in North American universities. *Journal of Science*, 329, 1468-1470.
- ▶ Sicart, M. (2014). *Play matters*. MIT Press